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THE YEAR FOR TOLERANCE

FRANCINE FOURNIER, UNESCO Assistant Director-General, discusses education as an instrument to master the impulses of human beings to be intolerant. She stresses tolerance as a basis for human rights. There is a need to educate not only children and parents, but also military and police. There are manifestations of intolerance at different levels, such as an increase in new expressions of racism and ethnic and religious differences, in both developed and developing countries. Fournier suggests that history books should be examined carefully for their role in the promotion and teaching of intolerance. She speaks of mobilizing public opinion through increased communication to young people -- via concerts, for example -- and emphasizes examination of media's role in promoting violence and intolerance.

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ANNOUNCER: From United Nations Headquarters in New York, this is **World Chronicle**, an unedited interview programme about major global issues. Here now to introduce our guest is the host of today's **World Chronicle**.

LITTLEJOHNS: I'm Michael Littlejohns, and this is **World Chronicle**.

In addition to celebrating its fiftieth anniversary this year, the United Nations has also proclaimed it the Year for Tolerance. It hopes to heighten public awareness of the threat to peace posed by the lack of tolerance among nations, communities and individuals. The Preamble to the Charter of the world organization reminds us all of the need to practise tolerance for the maintenance of peace, justice, respect for human rights and the promotion of social progress. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, or UNESCO, will coordinate all United Nations activities regarding this year.

Our guest today is Francine Fournier, UNESCO's Assistant Director-General for Social Sciences. Joining me to talk with Ms. Fournier are Bhaskar Menon of *The Times of India* and Afsane Bassir Pour of *Le Monde*. Ms. Fournier, welcome to **World Chronicle**.

FOURNIER: Thank you very much.

LITTLEJOHNS: Tolerance, unfortunately, is a very rare commodity. It seems to go with human nature that people tend to be rather intolerant. And it starts with children. We know how children will bait those who perhaps have some physical disability or whatever, like chickens pecking the weakest in the pen. How does UNESCO think that it can change this?

FOURNIER: We firmly believe that human beings are fundamentally good and firmly believe that the human spirit can help to reorient the perversions that come out of human behaviour. Children are, yes, sometimes cruel, definitely; they are not all, and not always. And we believe that education is absolutely one of the ways to master the impulses that can come from any human being to be intolerant, to not respect diversity or to not respect a difference of others, or simply to become aggressive. There are ways: education at all levels, for children, before school, after school. Tolerance as an expression of respect of basic human rights also has to be taught to policemen, the military, social actors, politicians, children and adults, in formal and informal education.

LITTLEJOHNS: You're a social scientist; where do you think that intolerance manifests itself most of all? What areas of society, or internationally, even?

FOURNIER: Well, right now, we are all witnessing manifestations of intolerance at different levels, in so-called developed countries and in developing countries. The intolerance *barème* is not to be found only in certain specific circumstances. We find intolerance right now in the increase of xenophobia, in the increase of new expressions of racism, anti-Semitism, or tribalism that we see right now in different parts of the world, and once again, even in the so-called very developed countries, in expressions of gangs against gangs. It's not even a question

often of an identification through ethnic or religious differences, it's just a question of not being in the same block of streets. And you become intolerant just because you are something different, and you gang up on someone else. So, actually, we have expressions of intolerance at that level; we have expressions of extreme intolerance that have all kinds of causes which should be analyzed, as in Rwanda and Burundi, and also ex-Yugoslavia. Also, the lid is being taken off of eastern Europe. There are actually threats of intolerance that are enormous, but, once again, also in opulent societies where you have rich and poor, and you have people who feel they are menaced by something. And you can see this in expressions of xenophobia in western Europe, against --

LITTLEJOHNS: With the attitudes towards immigrants and so forth?

FOURNIER: Immigrants -- exactly.

LITTLEJOHNS: That's a form of intolerance?

FOURNIER: Absolutely.

LITTLEJOHNS: In the United States too, of course, I mean --

FOURNIER: Of course.

LITTLEJOHNS: Particularly against Mexicans.

FOURNIER: Of course.

MENON: Do you foresee, between the feeling of intolerance toward someone who's different and the mechanisms that are necessary to channel such feelings into hatred and into actual action -- I mean, probably not many of us are entirely free of some sort of prejudice, some shades of opinion about other minorities or other types of people, but how many of us would do what Hitler did?

FOURNIER: Exactly.

MENON: So what is the mechanism that translates a feeling, a general feeling of intolerance that might exist in any population, into action?

FOURNIER: I think that is absolutely crucial, what you are saying there. Because there is a possibility of perversion in any society, and the demonstration has been, of course, what led up to the World War Two. This seed is there, so what is important is to stop the growing of such seeds of intolerance.

MENON: So, but what are the elements to which you would ascribe the growth of such seeds? I mean, what is it that makes a Hitler potent in one period -- and there are many potential Hitlers in the world now who are unable to rise to power -- what is it that made Hitler rise to power?

FOURNIER: Well, a certain vacuum, I would say. First of all, a dissatisfaction in a given society, a frustration, a feeling of having been had, you know, of having lost something, of being unjustly treated. That kind of frustration. And on top of that, when you have leaders,

when you have groups in a society that play on these feelings of dissatisfaction, and then these leaders are not stopped at the right time and are sometimes just -- you know, they just let it be, and we close our eyes to things --

MENON: Do you think that's what's happened in the wake of the end of the cold war? Do you think these leaders are being tolerated in Rwanda and Burundi? Do you think there is a certain element of tolerance of hatred?

FOURNIER: Yes, I think so. I think we have let -- I say "we", the world -- have let things develop that could have been stopped before. Definitely.

LITTLEJOHNS: Idi Amin in Uganda, for example, could have been stopped.

FOURNIER: Of course. Of course.

LITTLEJOHNS: Afsane?

BASSIR POUR: How do you deal with different cultures? For example, for us, some cultures might seem intolerant, whereas they might think that we are intolerant because we don't respect their culture. I'm sure that's one of the main problems that you must face. How do you deal with that?

FOURNIER: Yes. Well, the position of UNESCO, as I think of the UN, is that cultural diversity is a richness. It enriches any society, and certainly enriches the world. So the respect of differences, of cultural differences, is absolutely essential. Precisely when you put a lid on cultural diversities you can come up with frustrations and with a backlash that can be very, very dangerous. But what cannot be tolerated, and the trap that we have to avoid, is to tolerate infringement upon human rights, universal human values, in the name of culture. This is the cultural diversity trap, if you wish, that in the name of culture you will torture. I will give you an example that I think is good. We just held a meeting in December in Barcelona which got together 15 of the most known religions of the world, with very important representatives of those religions. And these representatives of these religions came up with a declaration saying that in no way in the name of religion could violence be tolerated. So violence cannot be used as a means of implementing --

BASSIR POUR: It's not always violence, it's discrimination, for example --

FOURNIER: Of course. Of course.

BASSIR POUR: In Islamic countries, homosexuality is just not accepted.

FOURNIER: Yes.

BASSIR POUR: They're discriminated against, even if there's no violence. Is there a way of dealing with this, or -- as you said, education is one of the methods. Or would it be considered as an infringement on these cultures?

FOURNIER: I think these are extremely difficult questions, as you can see --

BASSIR POUR: As your whole subject is.

FOURNIER: The whole subject! The basic, once more, is the universal values and the recognition that human rights and fundamental freedoms are universal and interdependent, which means civil and political rights, and social, economic and cultural rights. They are basic. The ways of expressing institutions and the different colorations of expressing respect for human rights can be different. We don't need to have one model across the world to do that. But I, for example, could not accept that in the name of culture you permit the -- how do you say in English? excision? -- of young girls --

LITTLEJOHNS: Female circumcision.

FOURNIER: Yes. Thank you. -- Even though that is an important part of culture. But it is not up to me to tell a society how to deal with that. What we come up with is examples of how you can come out of it. We cannot impose that. We have no mandate for imposing anything, anyway. We are --

BASSIR POUR: Raise awareness.

FOURNIER: Yes, we are a kind of conscience of the world, if you wish. When I say "we" I mean UNESCO, of course, because it is in our mandate. So we use the instruments that we have, which are education, which are the development and the transfer of knowledge, scientific knowledge, and social --

MENON: It's easy to say that, but when you come down to practical terms.... I was in a group yesterday discussing precisely the issue of racism in the United States, and one of the things that the group -- and it was an almost entirely white group, it was an entirely white group except for me; there were supposed to be a couple of African-Americans present, but there weren't. And I think there was -- at some point in the discussion there was a general frustration that people of good will and of good heart had so little means by which to express their good will. What are the mechanisms by which this can be done in the era of tolerance? How do good people express their tolerance?

FOURNIER: There are different ways. One of them is promoting the idea of tolerance. And for that, as you will see from the plan of action that we already have on the table, [we have planned] demonstrations around the world, that can go from seminars for reflection on tolerance and democracy, international law and tolerance, genetics and tolerance.... I mean, all types of --

MENON: No but, you see, it's all very well for people who are already converted to feel and have seminars, but how do you reach out and be effective?

FOURNIER: This is one way to have reflection. But once again you have to go further than that, you have to mobilize public opinion through means that communicate with people, with young people in particular. So we are doing things with popular singers and musicians; we are doing things with sports -- because violence in sports is an expression of an intolerant

attitude, definitely; we are trying to get everywhere. But what I think is also essential in this year is that Member States make commitments to define programmes, strategy and policies to control intolerance. So this is important, and means that education must be revised, in terms of human rights and tolerance education; which means, for example, that history books must be looked into very, very seriously, because they very often carry the image.... In ex-Yugoslavia, this was one of the elements, part of the problem, with people building up a certain history that is definitely constrictual, where the good people are on one side and the bad are on the other, and that's it, and you must avenge for centuries and centuries, you still must avenge --

BASSIR POUR: And they'll accept it? This revising of histories?

LITTLEJOHNS: Just a moment, please. This is **World Chronicle**, our guest is Francine Fournier, UNESCO's Assistant Director-General for Social and Human Sciences. Afsane, you were going to....

BASSIR POUR: Yes, I was just going to follow up. Have they accepted -- have they revised the history books?

FOURNIER: Yes, there have been some arrangements, not all over, okay --

BASSIR POUR: The Turks and the Greeks are not going to hate each other.

FOURNIER: Some part of it, some part of it. But we're working on it. And another example, or instrument that we have to look into is the media. The expression --

LITTLEJOHNS: We in the media are encouraging intolerance?

FOURNIER: Both. I mean, we need -- there is a need to help media to exist, independent media, in periods of conflict. We have -- as have others, actually -- but we have contributed in helping for an independent media in Sarajevo, a newspaper --

LITTLEJOHNS: Non-government controlled.

FOURNIER: Non-government controlled, that the journalist -- it was -- I'm sorry, I'm not very good in pronouncing it -- with journalists who were from all parts of the conflict, if you wish, to give information that would be more objective. So this is an important part, but also there is a lot of work to be done in terms of an ethical responsibility of television, of radio, of not transmitting violence, images, in a general way --

LITTLEJOHNS: You're speaking of entertainment or news coverage?

FOURNIER: I was going to speak of both, actually. Because there is this problem of violence in entertainment, in a general way. And I am not a psychologist, but I'm sure that it does influence children who look at people killing each other all day; it must do something.

LITTLEJOHNS: On the other hand, you know, if it hadn't been for the television images of the terrible things that were happening in Somalia, when these kids were dying, and mothers and so on and so forth, the United Nations might not have gotten involved there.

FOURNIER: This is precisely not entertainment.

LITTLEJOHNS: No.

FOURNIER: So that's the other part.

MENON: That wasn't violence either, Michael, that was starvation.

LITTLEJOHNS: Well, it was a sort of violence.

FOURNIER: Yes. But it isn't presented as an entertainment. It's the other part of the media that is .... Here we need to encourage freedom of expression and the free flow of information, so that information is not controlled. So this is just encouragement, as we can do. But there's also something to be sought out. We all have to think hard that we would never again allow this situation of Radio Milles Collines in Rwanda, where there was a definite appeal to genocide.

LITTLEJOHNS: To violence, yes.

FOURNIER: To genocide. They were saying "If you do not kill everyone, including the children, they will grow up and they will kill you."

BASSIR POUR: They're countering this by UN radio [Radio UNAMIR]. It's --

FOURNIER: Yes. Exactly. So the way to counter that has been now there's UN radio, in which we have participated in giving positive information and information on the practical issues.

BASSIR POUR: If I may change the subject, there's a mechanism now, and it's well accepted, of the Human Rights Commission, where countries are actually accused every year. Is it conceivable to have some kind of a mechanism for a country to be singled out as being more intolerant than the other? Is that a thought that has --

FOURNIER: Well, it would not be under UNESCO; that's not exactly our mandate. But we do have the possibility of treating individual cases of violations of human rights. But what we will be doing is setting up an observatory with the different networks across the world that already exist, which would work with us and inform us of violations of human rights -- in the fields of competence of UNESCO, of course, because there is the Commission, as you have said. "In the field of competence of UNESCO" means the students, teachers, researchers who often are the first ones to be eliminated in situations of aggravated intolerance -- artists, scientists, et cetera. So this observatory would help us to make reports, if they were asked from us, but also to intervene directly and try to sensitize the incriminated government, or the general population.

MENON: Could I ask you, the traditional focus at the UN -- or any international organization, when they talk about human rights and intolerance or racism -- the focus generally is on the third world. Historically, if you look at it, racism, the massive violation of human rights represented in the colonial period, Hitler himself, the whole Holocaust and the

Jews -- it was all in the developed world. What mechanisms -- this initiative that you just mentioned, will this look at the problem in the major developed countries?

FOURNIER: Definitely, definitely. I think that's very important to put on the table as such; as I said before, these examples are all over the world -- in different intensity, though. Because it is true that when you have one country that is non-democratically governed, it is much easier to have very severe abuses of human rights. So it is a fact, but it doesn't mean that in countries that are democratically governed there is no abuse and there is no intolerance. We see it on television and in the news all the time.

LITTLEJOHNS: How is UNESCO actually pursuing its mandate? You're not going to have another summit conference in this year of summit conferences?

FOURNIER: No, no. As I was saying, there has been a tremendous response on the part of Member States as such and NGOs, civil society, --

LITTLEJOHNS: Non-governmental organizations.

FOURNIER: Non-governmental organizations all across the world, in schools -- children wanting to participate by writing a poem or drawing something. There really has been a very, very good response. So this is one thing....

LITTLEJOHNS: Is your main concentration going to be on education in the school systems? Is that going to be your main focus?

FOURNIER: Formal and non-formal education, definitely. And we will pursue the promotion in reaching out to parliamentarians, in reaching out to decision-makers at the local level, at the state level, et cetera. So it's not only the schools, but the schools are very, very important. There will be a kind of culmination of all these activities 16 November, which is the date of the anniversary of the signature of the constitutive act of UNESCO in Paris, and here we will have the results of these different reflections -- reflections and activities and participation of artists that already have demonstrated that they want to contribute to it.

MENON: Would it be possible, given the information that UNESCO now has, to compose something like a world map of intolerance?

FOURNIER: Well, we would have to be asked to do it.

LITTLEJOHNS: Politically a rather dangerous subject.

BASSIR POUR: There's a very effective group in France that started years ago, about ten years ago, SOS Racisme.

FOURNIER: Yes.

BASSIR POUR: That's been the most effective I've ever seen. Are you working with organizations like this?

FOURNIER: Absolutely. Yes.

BASSIR POUR: And you were talking about concerts, because that was their method. That's how they gathered people, thousands of people. What kind of concerts are you going to have? The fun part.

FOURNIER: For example, Jean Michel Jarre, who is an internationally known musician, modern orchestra -- he has volunteered. He is what we call a Goodwill Ambassador for UNESCO, and he will be working specifically on questions of tolerance. Mr. Pelé, who is the very well known Brazilian footballer, is going to --

LITTLEJOHNS: Oh, he's involved too?

FOURNIER: Yes, he's an Ambassador, and we will probably work out something precisely in terms of trying to calm the violence around football and sports in general.

LITTLEJOHNS: Certainly an area that needs some tolerance!

FOURNIER: That needs some kind of tolerance, some kind of looking into, yes! Yes. So the fun part, as you say, we will be getting these --

BASSIR POUR: When is this concert?

FOURNIER: Well, Jean Michel Jarre, there are -- I'm sorry, I don't know exactly the dates, but there are a few that are already programmed. One in Tokyo --

BASSIR POUR: In different parts of the world?

FOURNIER: Yes. One in Tokyo, one in Paris. And I'm missing out --

LITTLEJOHNS: Madame Fournier, we have only a few seconds left. The United States and the United Kingdom and Singapore pulled out of UNESCO. Is this going to prevent their participation in the Year? I mean, are they -- presumably they will not be part of UNESCO's activities, but are they supporting it?

FOURNIER: Yes. For example, in Great Britain, in the United Kingdom, we have different groups who have already demonstrated a very strong will to participate and to mobilize the population, and in the United States right now, there's a meeting next week, I think, of NGOs that want to work on it.

LITTLEJOHNS: Ms. Fournier, that's all the time we have. Thank you for being with us on this edition of **World Chronicle**.

Our guest has been Francine Fournier, UNESCO's Assistant Director-General for Social and Human Sciences. She was interviewed by Bhaskar Menon of *The Times of India* and Afsane Bassir Pour of *Le Monde*. I'm Michael Littlejohns. Thank you for joining us. We invite you to be with us for the next edition of World Chronicle.

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